



The Congressional Connector

Week of February 23 – 27, 2009

President Obama Addresses Joint Session of Congress

On February 24, President Obama spoke to a special joint session of the Senate and the House of Representatives to discuss the economy and the steps necessary to confront the challenges facing the country. The President said: "I know that for many Americans watching right now, the state of our economy is a concern that rises above all others. And rightly so. If you haven't been personally affected by this recession, you probably know someone who has.... But while our economy may be weakened and our confidence shaken; though we are living through difficult and uncertain times, tonight I want every American to know this: We will rebuild, we will recover, and the United States of America will emerge stronger than before." [To read the entire text of the President's speech, click here.](#)

Importantly, as to the auto industry, President Obama said, "the nation that invented the automobile cannot walk away from it." He also highlighted that it was unacceptable that the production of future U.S. electric vehicles could be powered by Korean batteries. That is why it is so important that the recent recovery package included \$2 billion to support U.S. manufacturers of advanced vehicle batteries and battery systems.

Reps. Levin and Dingell Meet with Obama Auto Team

Reps. Levin and Dingell met for an hour with President Obama's auto team and found them to be engaged in their assignment, knowledgeable and committed to tackling the tough issues confronting the domestic automotive sector during these very difficult economic times. Reps. Levin and Dingell shared with them their views on the challenging path forward and the use of the Administration's position to help shape a course where all of the stakeholders contribute to the restructuring efforts and accelerate the advanced technologies that are so vital to producing the cars of the future, and maintaining these jobs in the U.S.

House Debates Mortgage Relief Bill

As the Connector goes to press, the House is debating legislation [H.R. 1106] to help millions of families restructure or refinance their mortgages to avoid foreclosure. The bill includes incentives to encourage lenders to negotiate affordable mortgages for homeowners who are underwater, at risk of foreclosure, and those nearing bankruptcy. As part of the effort to push lenders into helping families who have run out of options, the bill allows bankruptcy judges to modify the terms for existing mortgage. The bill also protects loan servicers from lawsuits for modifying loans.

Speaking in support of the legislation, which is based on a housing plan announced by President Obama, Rep. Levin said: "Effectively addressing the foreclosure crisis goes hand in hand with restoring stability to the financial system and jumpstarting our economy. The loss of a home is devastating to each individual family, brings down home prices for entire communities, strains local government budgets and undermines our ability to recover from this deepening economic crisis."

Michigan Lawmakers Introduce Great Lakes Restoration Bill

Concerned citizens and local officials throughout the Great Lakes region converged on Washington this week to urge Congress to do more to protect the Great Lakes. The recently approved economic recovery legislation contained \$170 million for Michigan to upgrade its water infrastructure, but clearly a more concentrated effort is needed to restore and protect the Great Lakes.

Twenty-eight members of the House, including Rep. Levin, recently cosponsored legislation [H.R. 500] introduced by Rep. Ehlers of Michigan to augment Great Lakes cleanup efforts, protect the lakes from aquatic invasive species, and preserve wetlands. The legislation seeks to implement the recommendations developed by the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration in 2005. [For more information, click here.](#)

House Approves 2009 Funding Bills

On February 25, the House voted 245 to 178 to approve legislation [H.R. 1105] to wrap up Congress' work on the 2009 funding bills that support a wide variety of federal programs. Normally these bills are supposed to be completed by the first day of the federal government's fiscal year (October 1) but Congress and President Bush were unable to reach a compromise to finish nine of the key funding bills. The root of the impasse was the Bush Administration's insistence on unacceptably deep cuts in energy research, health care, education, law enforcement and biomedical research. Since October 1, the programs covered by H.R. 1105 have been operating under a stop-gap funding mechanism that expires on March 6. The Senate is expected to consider H.R. 1105 next week.